

Gallions' Book Society

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Context

Gallions Primary School is a three-form entry school in Newham, London. It has a high level of EAL pupils which we feel has a significant impact on how much the children read and are read to at home. The school has a broad range of teachers who largely reflect the backgrounds of the pupils. Reading has not been a high priority in the community and is generally only thought of in terms of attainment for most teachers. Reading scores have been consistently below targets.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

Following exploration of Cremin et al's research findings, *Teachers as Readers* (2014), we recognised that we needed to engage teachers more in children's literature, to become an adult reading community. As Professor Teresa Cremin states, 'teachers' knowledge of texts and of readers is the cornerstone on which interactive communities of readers are built' (2019). Primary schools rely on the passion and expertise of their staff, and so we began an adult book club as an informal way of engaging disengaged staff in reading and reading conversations. These informal conversations sprung from a strong bedrock of more enthusiastic members of staff. It was hoped that the book club would inspire informal conversations between staff members and this in turn would raise the profile of reading across the school. Teresa Cremin notes, '*to create reading communities, teachers need rich repertoires of children's texts and knowledge of their readers, a responsive pedagogy.*'

Aims

The aims of 'Gallions' Book Society' are:

- to encourage informal book talk around a range of shared reading experiences
- to give teachers a broader knowledge of literature
- to allow teachers to share their enthusiasm for particular books
- to encourage teachers to share books with their classes.

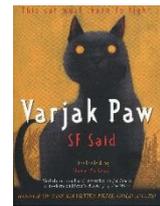
We wanted the aims to be informal because this book club would rely on naturally occurring conversations. However, a particular focus of our adult conversations was how they might feed back into classrooms and be spread throughout the school.

Another important aspect of our book club was to promote the idea of Reading Teachers who understand both the social and solitary natures of reading and how they can influence children. The reading lives of teachers could be shared with students to open up readers' lives is part of the reading curriculum.

Outline

Our staff book club was informally created out of staff room conversations about adult books coupled with the recognition that all staff could benefit from an increased knowledge of children's literature.

It was agreed that we would meet once a month and books would alternate between adult and children's books. Initially the book club had about 8 members but that has since increased to about 15 depending on the month and selection of books. The school supplied the children's books, but adult books were purchased by the book club members. Our book club has already run for 6 months.



Impact

The impact across the school has been far greater than anticipated. Initially, it was expected that only teachers with an already existing love of reading would join and even then that it may be hard to maintain our group. Since Gallions' Book Society was started we have seen:

- an increase in the number of teachers participating in the group. The attendees are from a broad range of teachers in terms of the age they teach and their curriculum speciality;
- a huge increase in informal book chat across the school from teachers to teaching assistants and admin staff;
- increased conversation about books used in lessons as well as the reactions of students to the books we choose to support our curriculum;
- an increase in the diversity of books the school has available to students and teachers;
- staff requesting specific books in order to do their own research and follow their own preferences for reading;
- a broadening of staff's knowledge of children's literature. The book club has a long backlist of books 'we would like to read' off the back of suggestions from members and other curious staff.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The initial impact of something as simple as a book club has been a revelation. Staff at Gallions have embraced the book club and it has become a part of everyday conversation. Staff are frequently caught discussing books and there is a huge increase in the status of reading within school.

There are, however, limitations to these otherwise positive developments. The group is, and of course always should be, a voluntary group which means that there are certain staff/ teachers that still do not consider themselves readers and see reading for (their own) pleasure to be outside of something that they are either capable of or interested in. There needs to be greater steps taken in

order to engage these staff members in conversations about reading. Perhaps this might be achieved by lowering the bar required for them to participate or it could be through the school buying a selection of new books each month from a range of genres and then allowing staff access to these before sharing them with the children. These ways forwards might help to remove possible barriers of overwhelming choice and access to books.

Further steps need to be taken as well in terms of creating positive reading communities in classrooms and with the wider school community. As it stands, this has been a good starting point and has helped to increase staff's knowledge of books while providing a fun and engaging context. This is vitally important and helps to promote reading as a social activity, which we need to convey and encourage with students. Teachers who understand this and are excited by it are the catalysts for this growth.